



Science and reason

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The history of science in India must be treated as a serious subject rather than a matter of speculation

- Another edition of the Indian Science Congress, another gift to the news cycle.
- The Congress, which is meant to be a premier forum for scientists to present and discuss their research, has in recent years become the stage for a series of blissfully evidence-free claims about Indian achievements in science through the ages.
- The organisers distanced themselves from the claims, prominent scientists denounced them, and protest marches were taken out.

Rooted in colonialism

- A glance at the past confirms that this is a deep-seated anxiety rooted in the experience of being colonised.
- Other Indian scientists went further, undertaking a serious study of the past.
- Indeed, historians have shown how the colonial encounter prompted among Indian intellectuals a project of 'revivalism', a quest to show that Indian traditions were not devoid of rationality, objectivity, and other characteristics of modern science.

Stop the labels

- More than a century later, there is little reason for us Indians to harbour an inferiority complex, and no excuse for tackling it through rash and unfounded claims.
- Science has never developed exclusively within national boundaries.
- Recent research speaks of the 'circulation' of scientific ideas, practices, instruments and personnel across regions and continents in different periods of history, while acknowledging that there were unequal power relations between those regions.
- What we often call 'western' science builds on the contributions of

scientists from all over the world today, and draws upon sources ranging from the ancient Greeks to the West Asian civilisations of a millennium ago.

- Once we rid ourselves of the need to label science as western or eastern and shake off the obsession with priority (i.e. which society was the first to discover or invent something), we will liberate ourselves to think about the further development, practice, and application of science.

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